

Abstract

Third-parties often react to an interpersonal conflict by taking sides. However, under the assumption that third parties are to help disputants resolve their problems, the topic of side-taking has been overlooked in the literature of conflict management. In this theoretical paper, we propose self-interest, moral and relationship motives to explain the psychological mechanism of side-taking. We then discuss how disputant-related factors (in terms of the influences of status differences between third parties and disputants), dispute-related factors (in terms of conflict types) and contextual factors (in terms of individualism-collectivism) have an influence on the three types of side-taking motives to gain a deeper and broader understanding of side-taking. By focusing on side-taking and analyzing the motives for side-taking, our theoretical framework connects and extends the literatures on third-party intervention and coalition formation. It also bridges the gap between individuals, dyads, groups, and organizations at different levels of studying conflict processes.

Key Words: Interpersonal Conflicts; Side-Taking Motives; Third Parties

A Psychological Approach to Third-Party Side-Taking in Interpersonal Conflicts

In organizational life, employees from workers on the front line to directors in the management board, all observe and experience interpersonal conflicts between others. Interpersonal conflicts may take various forms, ranging from minor disagreements to physical assaults, and can be covert (e.g., spreading rumors about a coworker) or overt (e.g., quarreling with each other) (Weingart, Behfar, Bendersky, Todorova & Jehn, 2015). When faced with an interpersonal conflict, third-party observers are often thought to play a role as arbiters or witnesses who de-escalate conflicts. However, what we tend to overlook is that those third-party observers also have a host of interests and considerations themselves, many of which involve taking sides—a response that favors one disputant over the other in their involvement.

The consequences of side-taking by third-party observers can be severe: they may change the power structure of disputants, thus influencing the conflict outcomes; they can escalate a two-party dispute into a multi-party conflict; they may even transform third-party observers from a kind of “by-standers” into the partisans of disputants. A good understanding of taking sides by third-party observers will thus pave a new avenue for third-party’s alternative way for conflict intervention. As a first step towards theorizing third-party side-taking, in this paper we focus on clarifying the underlying psychological motives and the situational factors that aggravate or alleviate the side-taking motives. By analyzing the psychological considerations underlying side-taking, our overarching goal is to expand the scope on understanding conflict intervention.

Side-taking refers to a set of actions with which individuals help fight other people's battles by favoring one disputant over the other. Side-taking can be executed implicitly (e.g., keep silence and acquiesce) or explicitly (e.g., enshield one-side's wrongdoing, openly show support to the favorite side, or conspire against the unfavorable party). In theory, any "third" party who is not part of the conflict can take sides. However, professional third parties, such as arbitrators and mediators, who are influenced by their job role to be impartial and indifferent (Elangovan, 1995; Ross & Conlon 2000; Sheppard, 1984), are often consciously and deliberately against taking sides in a conflict. We thus opt them out of the third parties being analyzed in this paper. More specifically, we highlight those third parties who are observers, originally not part of a conflict, and have little obligation towards conflict resolutions. A good example of a non-professional third-party observer is a colleague who is confronted with a conflict between two superiors when both sides signal a need for support.

Below, we begin by highlighting the potential contributions of studying side-taking to the field of conflict management, and then propose three psychological considerations or motives that third parties may have regarding side-taking. Next we discuss how party-related factors (in terms of status differences between third parties and disputants), dispute-related factors (in terms of conflict types) and context-related factors (in terms of national culture of individualism-collectivism) can have an influence on third parties' side-taking motives. The paper concludes with a discussion on three critical issues related to side-taking and some suggestions on future directions towards theorizing and empirically studying side-taking by third parties.

Contributions of Research on Side-Taking

Research on side-taking has some important theoretical contributions. To begin with, studying side-taking bridges the conceptual gap between ambivalences in role conflicts and disagreements in social conflicts. Despite their common denominator of conflict, the role-conflict school (e.g., Carnes, 2016; Gross, Mason, & McEachern, 1958; Miller & Shull, 1962) and the social-conflict school (e.g., Pruitt & Kim, 2004; Van de Vliert, 1997) have developed in almost total isolation from each other. This absence of cross-cutting ties is thought to be unfortunate, not only because role-conflict dilemmas and social-conflict issues feed on each other (Van de Vliert, 2010), but also because intrapersonal and interpersonal conflict do not differ in basic modes of conflict handling—avoiding, accommodating, compromising, problem solving and fighting (Van de Vliert, 1981, 1997). The topic of third-party side-taking may serve as a cross-cutting tie that elegantly bridges the unfortunate divide between workers' ambivalences and disagreements in organizational networks.

Second, apart from connecting ambivalences and disagreements as a way of understanding of conflicts, studying side-taking also bridges the gap between individuals, dyads, groups, and organizations at different levels of studying conflict processes. Conflicts in the literature are traditionally approached and studied by levels; *intrapersonal* role conflict (e.g., Carnes, 2016), *interpersonal* conflict (e.g., Van de Vliert, 1997), team or group conflict (e.g., Jehn, 1997), and organizational including labor-management conflict (e.g., Ury, Brett & Goldberg, 1988). Analyzing conflicts across levels is crucially relevant yet rare. Side-taking offers a unique opportunity to integrate conflict knowledge across levels.

Third, by studying side-taking, we also shift the research focus from coalition founders to coalition targets in the literature on coalition formation. In the social-psychological approach to coalition formation, coalition founders who begin the activity of coalescing have been conventionally distinguished from coalition targets or coalition members who are considered an optimal coalition partner (e.g., Murnighan & Brass, 1991). The majority of the work in the field, however, has been conducted from the perspective of coalition founders (e.g., Caplow, 1956; Wilke, 1985; Van Beest & Van Dijk, 2007). We believe that whether a coalition can be successfully formalized in the end depends on the targets' choice. Research on taking sides will provide some tentative answers to the question of why coalition targets would accept or reject the coalition pulls or pushes.

Fourth, studying side-taking may contribute to our understanding of employees' political behavior in organizations. Taking sides in conflict is a good example of how employees participate in organizational politics. By taking sides in others' conflict, employees can demonstrate their downward or upward influence (Porter, Allen & Angle, 1983). In comparison with other types of political behavior (e.g., whistle-blowing, indirect voicing), side-taking has not received sufficient attention in the field of organizational politics. An exploration of side-taking may thus benefit both theoretical understanding and practical use of employees' influence attempts and political behavior.

Apart from theoretical importance, side-taking can also have implications for management practices. First, side-taking may change the likely results of the conflict and the power structure between disputants. For instance, when groups use voting or consensus building to make decisions, side-taking will have tangible consequences for

conflicting parties. The more votes a party gets, the better chance it will win out. In addition, side-taking may also have an intangible effect for conflicting parties: the side who gains the support from third parties may get more recognition and acquire extra status and informal influence, which further leads to more credibility and prestige, and thus better outlooks for forming successful coalitions in the future (Murnighan & Brass, 1991).

Second, side-taking intertwines with conflict intervention and coalition formation. Side-taking will get third-party observers involved in the conflict of others. From the perspective of the third-party observers, side-taking can be considered a type of intervention, regardless of their active or passive involvement. However, from the perspective of the disputants, side-taking may symbolize a success or failure in building up a coalition. Side-taking in the eyes of disputants can thus be interpreted as a promising step towards coalition formation. Understanding side-taking is therefore not only useful for conflict intervention but also for coalition formation.

Third, side-taking is almost inevitably a kind of self-serving behavior for third parties, especially when they are confronted with a conflict between disputants who have higher status or power over them (Bendersky & Hays, 2012). Taking the “correct” side, third-parties as part of a coalition are entitled to claim the winning outcomes (e.g., promotion, fast-track career). Contrarily, they may have to suffer from taking the “wrong” side (e.g., promotion opportunities and career development may be blocked).

Self-Interest, Moral and Relationship Motives for Side-Taking

Building on the theories of coalition formation in triads (e.g., Caplow, 1956; Gamson, 1961), social motives in terms of belongingness and affiliation (Fiske, 2009)

and social identity (Hogg, 2005), and the moral judgement hypothesis regarding side-taking (DeScioli & Kurzban, 2013; DeScioli, 2016), we propose *self-interest, relationship and moral motives* to explain third parties' side-taking reactions. These three motives cover third parties' considerations of the self (self-interests), others (relationship) and external standards (moral concerns), which represent the universe of possible motives in conflict handling. In addition, these three motives are corresponding to the dominant research trends —rational models (e.g., Caplow, 1956; Gamson, 1961); social relationship models (e.g., De Dreu & Van Lange, 1995; Gelfand, Major, Raver, Nishii, & O'Brien, 2006) and justice models (Lewicki & Sheppard, 1985; Tyler, 1990) on studying third-party intervention and conflict resolution, respectively.

Self-interest motives

Self-interest motives refer to third parties' concerns about what they may lose or gain by taking sides with each of the disputants. The economic models of coalition formation in triads (Caplow, 1956; Gamson, 1961) set a cornerstone for this type of motives and assume that third parties, like disputants, try to maximize their own outcomes when they are either actively or passively involved in a conflict. Wilke (1985) framed the principle of self-interests as “minimum-effort-for-maximum-gains” in coalition formation. Regarding side-taking, we suggest that third parties can take two approaches to maximize their own outcomes: They can side with the disputant who has a potential either to execute punishments or to provide rewards.

Imagine subordinate, C, is facing with a disagreement between the two supervisors A and B. If C anticipates a heavy sanction from going against supervisor B (e.g., lose promotion opportunity or salary increase), C may have to side with B to protect

his/her self-interests. In a different approach, C may also be tempted by the opportunity of job recommendation offered by Supervisor A, C will thus side with A to maximize his/her own gains. Whether avoiding sanctions or seeking rewards, third parties' side-taking motives in their nature lie in self-interests—what can they lose or gain by taking the side of each disputant? We use *self-interest motives* to refer to the desires of moving away from losses or toward gains in taking sides in an interpersonal conflict.

Relationship motives

Humans are group animals. Belongingness and affiliation are core social motives of human beings (Fiske, 2009). It drives individuals to establish, maintain, or restore a positive and affective relationship with another person or group of persons in order to satisfy individuals' desires of interacting with others and for being accepted (Koestner & McClelland, 1992). By taking sides, third parties join a camp and acquire group membership, which satisfies their needs of belongingness. Certainly, by taking sides, third parties may be also faced with the threat that they will be socially excluded by the side they are against, which in turn further deteriorates the existing relationship between third parties and the “unfavorable” party. However, in comparison to non-side-taking which possibly results in third parties being embraced by neither disputant or even rejected by both disputants, side-taking at least provides a little more insurance to third parties' belongingness in the first place.

In addition, in a side-taking situation, the presence of the opponents will signify the nature of “us versus them”, which trigger the process of social identity (Hogg, 2005). As a result, the cohesiveness between third parties and the disputant with whom they have a rapport relationship becomes stronger. Put differently, without the presence of the

opponent as a contrast, third parties may not feel the necessity to bind together with the closer party. But the presence of the opponent will certainly help third parties clarify the issue of who is in-group and who is out-group. The “us versus them” feeling not only enforces the camaraderie between third parties and the close party but also leads third parties to be less likely to be put off by becoming the target of denigration from the distant disputant. As a result, third parties are more likely to side with the close party and against the distant one.

Third, the principle of the relationship balance theory (Heider 1958)—“my friend’s enemy is my enemy”—also explains how relationship motives for side-taking work. According to Heider (1958), tripartite relationships are often asymmetric: Third parties are psychosocially closer to one party than the other. Given this relational asymmetry and given that two disputants usually have a negative attitude towards each other, the principle of “my friend’s enemy is my enemy” suggests that third parties tend to develop a negative attitude towards the psychologically distant party in order to keep their internal psychological state balanced. When applying this principle into side-taking situations, it suggests that the relationship motives drive third parties to back up the closer disputant and side against the distant disputant.

Moral motives

Moral motives in our theoretical model refer to third parties’ concerns of whether disputants’ claims or actions are right-or-wrong, reasonable or unreasonable, fair or unfair. It is worthwhile to note that the moral concerns in our model are emphasized from a psychological perspective. They are what third parties perceive as right-or-wrong and do not necessarily refer to an objective moral code that everyone ascribes to. Thus, there

is a variation regarding moral concerns among third parties. Different from other animals, humans assign moral values to actions (Wright, 1994). Like other human beings, third parties are thought to judge actions such as lying, theft, cheating, or bullying to be morally wrong even when these actions can achieve better outcomes (Baron & Spranca, 1997). It means that third parties do have the tendency to evaluate disputants' claims and actions via the lens of morality. DeScioli's work on moral judgment (2016; DeScioli & Kurzban, 2013) may explain why third parties are willing to join the alliances and help fight other people's battles. Moral judgment focuses on actions rather than the consequences of the actions. For side-taking, it means that third parties can support the right action (or the right side) and oppose the wrong action (or the wrong side) all the time without necessarily supporting/opposing the same party. The benefit of moral judgment is that it creates a flexible and cost-effective choice for third parties to react to a conflict. At least, it avoids being revenged in the future. In addition, the moral rules are usually determined by the majority. Siding with the "right" side (often the case of the "majority" side) and against the "wrong" side (most likely the "minority" side) might also satisfy third parties' needs for belongingness and affiliation indirectly.

Back to the example in which subordinate C is faced with a conflict between supervisors A and B, if C perceives B's arguments or actions right and reasonable, it will trigger C's moral motives for side-taking. By the same token, if A holds the same arguments or actions, C's moral motives for side-taking with A will become salient. All in all, moral concerns drive third parties to side with the "right" and against the "wrong". We refer to the psychological drives of third parties supporting the "right" and siding

against the “wrong” based on their moral judgment of right or wrong, good or bad, fair or unfair, moral integrity or immoral dishonesty as “*moral motives*” for side-taking.

To summarize the three psychological motives for side-taking discussed above, we propose:

Proposition 1: When third parties are faced with an interpersonal conflict between two disputants, self-interest, relationship, and moral motives will trigger third parties’ side-taking responses.

Relationships among the three side-taking motives

Although we treat the three types of side-taking motives as if they are separate and independent considerations in theory, it is likely in real life that a third-party observer faced with a side-taking dilemma will consider all three motives spontaneously (e.g., How does this benefit me? How will this influence my personal relationships with disputants? And is either side right or wrong?). This suggests that the three types of motives for side-taking are connected and intertwined and all together shape the overall motives for side-taking. Below we first take a simpler version to demonstrate how situational factors influence each of the three motives for side-taking. Our assumption is that a given situation will trigger a specific type of motives and make it salient and dominant in the overall motive system (Van Kippenberg, 2000). We will then come back to discuss the interplay of the three motives with more details in the discussion section.

Disputant-, Dispute- and Context-related Influences on Side-Taking Motives

Literature on third-party intervention suggests that a third party needs to examine at least three questions for dispute intervention: Who are making the dispute? What is the dispute about? And in which situation/context is the dispute taking place? (Elangovan,

1995; Lewicki & Sheppard, 1985; Yang & Yousaf, 2017). Following this suggestion, we believe that these three aspects also need to be examined when analyzing third-party side-taking.

As for the disputant-related factors, we focus on the status differences between third parties and disputants as status issues permeate social and organizational life (Chen, Peterson, Phillips, Podolny, & Ridgeway, 2012) and most interpersonal conflicts stem from disagreements over the amount of dominance exerted in social relations (Gould, 2003). For the dispute-related factors, our focus is on types of conflict because they meaningfully characterize the conflict dilemma (Jehn, 1997). For the context-related factors, our choice is to concentrate on the cultural dimension of individualism and collectivism at the national level because national culture as a contextual factor plays an important role in third parties' conflict handling (Carnevale, Cha, Wan & Fraidin, 2004).

Effects of status differences on side-taking motives. Status in organizational settings is defined as the ranked relationship among employees which takes place in practice by means of differences in deference or influence (Piazza & Castellucci, 2014; Skvoretz & Fararo, 1996). It is worthwhile to note that it is not our intention here to make a theoretical distinction between status and power, although they tend to be tightly coupled (Bunderson & Reagans, 2011). We prefer status over power in that status is more of a property of observers, while power is more of a property of the actor (Blader & Chen, 2012; Magee & Galinsky, 2008). In a side-taking situation, the initial position of third parties is more an "observer" than an "actor". Below, we will use the ranking relationship between the third party (C) and the disputants (A and B) to demonstrate how status influences third parties' side-taking motives.

The Appendix lists all 27 possible configurations regarding status differences among three parties A, B, and C. In our analysis, we simplify these 27 configurations into 8 cases given that 1) status of the two disputants A and B are interchangeable ($A > B$ is same as $B > A$) and 2) our focus is on the relative status between third party C and two disputants (A and B), thus the combination of 2-1-1 is the same as the combination of 1-0-0. Below we analyze how C's side-taking motives changes as a response to the different cases of status differences between third party (C) and two disputants (A and B).

1. *Third party C has a higher status than both disputants A and B. A and B have an equal status ($C > A = B$; see Case 1 in the column of configurations in Appendix). An example is that a supervisor is confronted with a dispute between two peer subordinates.*
2. *Third party C has a higher status than both disputants A and B. A and B have an unequal status ($C > A > B$ or $C > B > A$; see Case 2 in the column of configurations in Appendix). Take, for instance, a managing director C who is faced with a dispute between a line manager A and A's subordinate, B.*

In both cases above, third party C has a higher status than the two disputants (A and B). Research on status has reached a conclusion that higher-status parties tend to be self-sustaining and maintain the established status hierarch (Blader & Chen, 2012; Bunderson & Reagans, 2011; Chen et al., 2003; Magee & Galinsky, 2008). This has a direct implication on how higher versus lower status parties concern for the issues of morality (e.g. legitimacy, fairness and justice). Higher status parties tend to notice and react to the fairness issues more strongly than lower status parties do (Chen et al., 2003;

Diekmann, Sondak, & Barsness, 2007). By means of demonstrating self-deserving, self-esteem, and good reputation, higher status parties maintain and defend their status. In addition, when the issues at hand are handled in a fair, just, and morally accepted way, individuals will tend to make more self rather than external attributions (e.g., If something is done right, it is because of me). This psychological mechanism satisfies high status parties' concerns for reputation and self-deservingness, thus contributing to defend their high status (Blader & Chen, 2012; Van Prooijen, Van den Bos, & Wilke, 2002).

Following this reasoning, supervisor C's primary concern in both cases listed above will be maintaining his/her status. From C's own perspective, if C handles the issues in a morally accepted way, it will be more likely that C will attribute the "success" to him-/herself more than to external situations. This will help to increase C's self-deservingness and maintain a good reputation, thus defending C's higher status. From the disputants' perspective, if C's side-taking decision is perceived as fair and just, it is more likely that the two subordinates (A and B) will accept, or at least not challenge, C's decision, which in a way can be seen as acknowledging C's status. We then expect that third parties with a higher status (than both disputants) will demonstrate stronger moral motives for side-taking.

Proposition 2a: If third party C has a higher status than both disputants A and B [either $C > (A=B)$, or $C > A > B$, or $C > B > A$], C will demonstrate relatively strong moral motives for side-taking.

3. *Third party C has a lower status than both disputants A and B. A and B have an equal status.* [$C < (A = B)$; see Case 7 in the column of configurations in

Appendix). A case in point is when a subordinate (C) is confronted with a dispute between two superiors (A and B), as is often the case in matrix-like organizations.

4. *Third party C has a lower status than both disputants A and B. A and B have an unequal status* ($C < A < B$ or $C < B < A$; see Case 8 in the column of configurations in Appendix). Here, an example is a subordinate confronted with a conflict between his/her line manager and the managing director.

In these two cases, third party C has a lower status than both disputants. The lower status parties (third-party C in this case) are often endorsed with less social advantages in allocating resources and gaining intangible assets than those higher status parties (in this case the two disputants, A and B) (Bendersky & Shah, 2012; Pearce & Xu, 2012). This has an implication on how lower- versus higher-status parties concern for the issues of outcomes and self-interests. In comparison to higher status parties, those with a low status are more concerned with not being exploited and unfavorably treated (Ellemers, Wilke, & Van Knippenberg, 1993; Diekmann et al., 2007). They routinely encounter both vulnerability and uncertainty (Kramer, 1996). It is likely that these concerns will narrow down the focus of the parties with a low status on to self-interests and self-payoffs.

C's lower status in the two cases above suggests that C has less control over tangible and/or intangible resources that the two disputants A and B have. In response, C's primary concerns will be on avoiding being treated unfavorably. It is thus highly possible that C will pay more attention to his/her own outcomes and benefits. Self-interest motives for side-taking are thus activated. For example, in the case where a

subordinate C is faced with a conflict between two supervisors A and B, a higher status means that both disputants, A and B, have capacities to offer rewards (salary increase, favorable performance appraisal etc.) or exercise punishments (e.g., block promotion opportunities and increase workload) to the lower status third-party C. C's concerns will be on how to avoid unfavorable treatments or being taken advantage of by the two disputants, which is likely to trigger his/her self-interests motives for side-taking. We thus propose:

Proposition 2b: If third party C has a lower status than both disputants A and B [either $C < (A=B)$, $C < A < B$ or $C < B < A$], C will demonstrate relatively strong self-interest motives for side-taking.

5. *Third party has an equal status with both disputants* ($C = A = B$. see Case 4 in the column of configuration in Appendix). This happens when an employee is confronted with a dispute between two peers in the organization.

Peers with an equal status (e.g., teammates) tend to have more informal interactions and develop more personal relationships with each other than with those across hierarchical status (e.g., supervisors or subordinates) in the workplace (Sias, 2014). As we explained earlier, the personal relationships in a triad are often unbalanced as employees engage in informal social interactions with each other both in and outside work (e.g., C and A may get along with each other because they join in the same sports club; C and B may be closer to each other as they are from the same country). The unbalanced relationships—third party is closer to one disputant than to the other—in turn may trigger third parties to process information selectively (Heider, 1958; Hopmann,

1996): they tend to pay more attention to and interpret information more positively if it comes from the disputant with whom they have a closer relationship.

In addition, some empirical evidence suggests that the extent to which party's concern about promoting justice and protecting self-interests is lower in an equal-status than in an unequal-status condition. For example, in one of their experimental studies, Chen et al (2003) showed that when participants have relatively equal status, neither moral concerns (in terms of fairness or justice) nor self-interest concerns (in terms of outcome favorability) would influence participants' reactions (in terms of interacting with others in the future). Supposing their findings are reliable, we argue that third parties' moral and self-interest motives in an equal-status situation may not be as pronounced as they are in unequal-status situations. As a result, it may create space for relationship motives to manifest themselves. Therefore, we propose:

Proposition 2c: If third party C has an equal status with both disputants A and B ($C = A = B$), C's will demonstrate relatively strong relationship motives for side-taking.

Apart from the five cases mentioned above, status differences between third party C and two disputants A and B, can also be formed in the following three ways:

6. *Third party C has an equal status with one disputant and a higher status than the other* ($C = A > B$ or $C = B > A$; see Case 3 in the column of cases in Appendix).
7. *Third party C has an equal status with one disputant and a lower status than the other* ($C = A < B$ or $C = B < A$; see Case 6 in the column of cases in Appendix).

8. *Third party C has a higher status than one disputant and a lower status than the other* ($A < C < B$ or $A > C > B$; see Case 5 in the column of cases in Appendix).

Side-taking motives in these three cases involve the combinations of motives that are derivable from the initial motives stated in propositions 2a, 2b and 2c. For example, in case 3 in Appendix, C's higher status than one of the disputants may activate his/her moral motives for side-taking and C's equal status to the other disputant may trigger his/her relationship motives for side-taking. Thus, a combination of moral and relationship motives will be both relatively strong in Case 3 (see Appendix). More specific predictions about cases 6, 7 and 8 can be found in Appendix.

Effects of conflict types on side-taking motives. Conflict types meaningfully capture what a dispute is about. We use this concept to illustrate how dispute-related factors can influence the side-taking motives of third parties. Two disputants A and B can disagree on many aspects: They may debate diverging ideas about how to accomplish their tasks (task conflict); have a disagreement on distributing resources (e.g., how to effectively organize and utilize group resources to accomplish tasks) (logistical conflict); disagree on member contributions (how to handle people who do not complete their assignments on time, free ride, or do not perform the duties as agreed) (contribution conflict), or have an interpersonal friction, interpersonal animosity, or tension (relationship conflict) (Behfar, Mannix, Peterson & Trochim, 2011; De Dreu & Weingart, 2003; Jehn, 1997; Jehn & Mannix, 2001). Here we focus on contribution conflict and relationship conflict because they are difficult to resolve and often need

third-party intervention. They are thus particularly relevant to third-party side-taking motives.

Contribution conflict highlights issues on the responsibilities of each disputant. Under a contribution conflict, all parties, including third parties, tend to pay attention to the worth of each disputant. There are reasons to assume that these concerns are interpreted in the sense of (un)fair or (un)just. For example, disputants may accuse each other of “free-riding”. Under this circumstance, justice, especially procedural justice, becomes a main concern in parties’ conflict perceptions (Leventhal, Karuza, & Fry, 1980; Jehn & Chatman, 2000; Tyler, 1990). Third parties are more likely to evaluate “good-or-bad” and “right-or-wrong” in order to be fair and just. We thus believe that contribution conflict is connected to moral motives for side-taking.

Proposition 3a: Contribution conflict between disputants is positively related to third parties’ moral motives of side-taking.

A relationship conflict concerns insights and information that are irrelevant to the task, involves negative emotions and threatens one's personal identity and feelings of self-worth (De Dreu & Weingart, 2003). A study done by De Dreu and Van Vianen (2001) suggests that disputants tend to use avoiding more than contending and collaborating responses to relationship conflicts. By avoiding, relationship conflicts, however, do not get resolved in and of themselves. Actually, disputants often ask help from third parties for relationship conflicts (Yang & Yousaf, 2017). We argue that tension and frustration of disputants in a relationship conflict are rooted in discrepant personal norms and values which are closely related to one's personal identity. It is thus difficult for third parties to settle such identity-related conflicts to mutual satisfaction. It

is highly possible for third parties, especially non-professional third parties, to react to a relationship conflict by taking sides. When third parties are surrounded by information that focuses on personal liking/disliking and identity and value clashes between disputants, their attention will be directed more to the social and interpersonal domain. Social motives like belongingness and affiliation will become more relevant and can be triggered easily when deciding whose side they are on. We then propose:

Proposition 3b: Relationship conflict between disputants is positively related to third parties' relationship motives of side-taking.

Effects of cultural individualism-collectivism on side-taking motives. National culture as a contextual factor plays an important role in third parties' conflict handling (Carnevale, Cha, Wan & Fraidin, 2004). We thus see no reason why national culture would not be relevant to third parties' side-taking motives. For this initial analysis, we focus on the well-known cultural dimension of individualism-collectivism. Hofstede describes this bipolar dimension of individualism versus collectivism as "the relationship between the individual and the collectivity which prevails in a given society" (Hofstede, 1991, p. 6).

In individualistic cultures, individuals tend to identify themselves as independent and unique entities. Self-interests are considered more important than social motives (e.g., belongingness and affiliation) in decision making. Individualists consider social relationships impermanent and non-intensive (Triandis, 1995). By contrast, collectivism is characterized by ingroup harmony and tight group bonds (Oyserman, Coon & Kemmelmeier, 2002). Social motives like belongingness and affiliation are given top priority by collectivists in making decisions. Research on cross-cultural conflict handling

has generally concluded that interest-based approaches and concerns for transaction costs are more emphasized by third parties in individualistic cultures than in collectivistic cultures. For example, American managers showed a stronger preference for interest-based conflict management than their Japanese counterparts do (Tinsley, 1998)

By contrast, in collectivistic cultures, the concerns on maintaining harmonious relationships between parties are given more priority. For example, a survey among 392 employees from 59 organizations in Turkey (a collectivistic culture) showed that the concern of maintaining harmonious relationships was significantly related to all third-party intervention strategies (i.e., mediational, educational, restructuring, and inquisitorial strategies) (Kozan, Ergin, & Varoglu, 2007). Although side-taking was not included in their study, the panoptic view shown in their results suggests a high possibility that third parties in collectivistic cultures would also take relationship seriously into account in choosing sides in a conflict. In two cross-cultural comparisons on how respondents react to a fictitious conflict situation by taking sides, Chinese participants (representing collectivistic cultures) on average reported a stronger concern about interpersonal relationships with the two disputants than Dutch participants do (representing individualistic culture) (Yang, Van de Vliert, & Shi, 2007). We thus propose:

Proposition 4a: Third parties in individualistic cultures will demonstrate stronger self-interest motives for side-taking than those in collectivistic cultures.

Proposition 4b: Third parties in collectivistic cultures will demonstrate stronger relationship motives for side-taking than those in individualistic cultures.

Discussion

Taking sides is a well-recognized phenomenon in the workplace but under-addressed in the conflict management literature. Here, we take a psychological perspective to theorize the three types of motives that influence third parties to take sides in an interpersonal conflict and discuss how status differences, conflict types and national culture influence self-interest, relationship and moral motives for side-taking. The purpose of this paper is to expand our current horizon on conflict handling in the workplace and to stimulate integration of the literature from different research areas, such as coalition formation, third-party intervention, status and power, social motives and justice to study more complex employee workplace behavior. In the following discussion section, we further elaborate three issues on studying side-taking motives as an inspiration for more research on side-taking.

Interplay of the three side-taking motives

In previous sections we take a parsimonious approach to build up the side-taking propositions and treat the three types of side-taking motives as if they are independent. To fully understand the complex of side-taking motives, we need to pay attention to the interplay of the three motives as well. From our point of view, the three types of motives for side-taking are expected to interact in at least three ways: they may reinforce, counterbalance and disguise each other.

The side-taking motives may work consistently by additively or interactively reinforcing each other. As a result, third parties will demonstrate a strong and overall motive for side-taking. For example, when faced with a dispute between two supervisors, A and B, a subordinate C may consider that A's arguments are more right than B's, which triggers C's moral motives for side-taking. Meanwhile, C may have a closer

relationship with A than with B, thus C's relationship motives will be activated. In addition, C might even expect more benefits from supporting A than B. The self-interest motives will then come into effect. All in all, the three motives reinforce each other and produce a strong overall motive to side with A and against B.

Sometimes, the three motives may work against each other and increase the third-party's choice dilemma. For example, in the above-mentioned situation, third party C may have strong moral motives (for taking A's side), but B is a very close friend of C, which triggers C's relationship motives (for taking B's side). To make things even more complicated, C may fear a retribution from siding against B. The self-interest motives for side-taking are then also activated. Whose side will C take? Future research needs to pay special attention to the counterbalance scenarios as the motives for side-taking become dynamic, shapeable and fluid.

Apart from reinforcement and counterbalance, the three motives can also disguise each other, which makes it difficult to interpret third-parties' true motives for side-taking. For instance, in the above case where A and B are supervisors, C may have strong self-interest motives for taking sides if C is tempted by a promise of promotion offered by B. However, C may present him/herself with strong moral motives for side-taking with deliberately denouncing how morally wrong A is. It is this disguise of motives for side-taking that results in a negative image of side-takers. They are often seen as dishonest, liar, and free-riders. This is another direction for future research on side-taking to explore. By studying the process of disguise around side-taking motives, we may eventually reveal the "fundamental" sources underlying the three motives.

From side-taking motives to side-taking behaviors

In this paper, we highlight the three psychological motives for side-taking and leave open the question of the extent to which side-taking motives will lead to side-taking behaviors. We made this choice as we believe that the relationships between side-taking motives and side-taking behaviors are not straight forward. We need to move step by step to unveil these complex relationships. Below we address three key issues on understanding the transition from side-taking motives to behaviors with the purpose to encourage more work in this direction.

First, side-taking behaviors in themselves are a complex whole. They do not often manifest themselves in a straightforward way. Although taking sides is considered part of natural human instincts for conflict handling (Mesterton-Gibbons, Gavrillets, Gravner, & Akcay, 2011), humans tend not to express this instinct in an explicit way. Third parties often show their side-taking behaviors implicitly via different ways (e.g. keeping silence; acquiescing; or saying one thing and doing another). The implicit nature of side-taking behaviors makes it difficult to observe or assess them. Side-taking behaviors may sometimes be misinterpreted as avoiding or even as problem-solving attempts. Before we can establish meaningful relationships between motives for side-taking and actual behaviors of side-taking, we first need to clarify and depict a range of verbal and nonverbal side-taking behaviors.

Second, as discussed, the three motives interplay with each other, which leads to another difficulty to understand the relationships between side-taking motives and side-taking behaviors. Because the three motives reinforce, counterbalance and disguise each other, the motive system for side-taking becomes much more complicated. For instance, the extent to which moral motives lead to siding with the “right” disputant may become

less significant when moral motives are counterbalanced by relationship and self-interest motives. Disguise may deceive not only disputants but also the third parties themselves to understand the “true” motivation for taking sides.

Third, side-taking motives and behaviors may perpetuate each other. Not only do side-taking motives cause side-taking responses, the motives in turn are often reinforced or modified by side-taking behaviors. It is likely that the perpetuation of side-taking motives and behaviors turns third-parties step by step away from their initial observer role into a partisan role that eventually escalates the conflict. All in all, our point is that the transition from side-taking motives to side-taking behaviors is more complicated than what is stated. The gap between motives and behaviors of taking sides deserves more attention in the form of a solid research agenda targeting taking sides by third parties.

Side-taking as a tool for understanding how conflict escalates (across levels)

Our model on third parties’ side-taking motives may offer some hints for how conflict escalates across levels. First, by taking sides, third-party observers become partisans of disputants. A conflict escalates from few to many. An interpersonal conflict upgrades into a group conflict. Disputants under an interpersonal conflict usually realize the importance of interdependency between themselves and their opponents. The mixed motive of cooperation versus competition influences the development of conflict (De Dreu & Van Lange, 1995). However, under a group conflict, the underlying dynamics will change into “to be or not to be” in terms of one’s social identity (Ellemers, Wilke, & Van Knippenberg, 1993). In this sense, side-taking changes the underlying conflict dynamics. Second, the self-interest motives indicate that third-party observers bring their own interests into the ongoing debate, which will proliferate the issues on the table. A

single-issue debate may thus easily escalate into a multi-issue conflict. Third, in a typical side-taking situation, each disputant tends to see him/herself as the personification of all good capacities and the opponent as the representation of many negative features. This polarized process (e.g., good-bad or right-wrong) can quite naturally ignite third-parties' moral motives for side-taking. With the moral motives stepping in, a minor issue is now even examined in the light of good-versus-bad. A solvable dispute may so turn into a fight of right-or-wrong. Compromise then hardly exists anymore for all parties including third parties as one cannot compromise in the matter of truth itself (Glasl, 1973). When a conflict transforms itself from few to many, from specific to general, from “doing well for self” to “trying best to hurting the other”, the cross-level escalation has become reality.

Limitations

Despite those theoretical and practical implications of our framework, we also notice some significant shortcomings in our way of theorizing side-taking in triads. First, we take a psychological perspective to analyze the side-taking motives of third-parties in an interpersonal conflict. One needs to be aware that this is only one way to study side-taking. Along with this psychological perspective, there are some other pathways to understand side-taking behaviors by third-parties. For example, from an evolutionary perspective, side-taking is viewed as an instinctive part of primates, including human beings (Mesterton-Gibbons et al., 2011), suggesting that taking sides (rather than helping disputants resolving a dispute) has genetic roots inside third parties. From a political and institutional perspective, side-taking can be viewed as a kind of survival strategy that a weak party has to play in an asymmetric power situation (Schlee, 2004). Thus, side-

taking needs to be analyzed not only at the individual-personal level but also at the organizational, institutional, or even national level. Linking side-taking research with the research on company mergers and acquisitions might create another direction for the field to move on.

Second, to build a sound theoretical model we need to strike a balance between parsimony and accuracy. As a first step towards theory building, our current framework may have tipped a bit far in the direction of simplicity. Future empirical studies need to develop these “simple” propositions into “testable” hypotheses. For example, we discuss the antecedents of side-taking motives from the factors related to disputants (in terms of status differences), disputes (conflict types) and contexts (national culture) separately. It is possible that side-taking motives are influenced by all those factors simultaneously. Empirical studies, may concentrate on a particular configuration to test our research propositions with more details. For instance, we only discuss that status differences between third party (C) and two disputants (A and B) will influence C’s side-taking motives. Future research can further refine how status symmetry between A and B may impact C’s side-taking motives. In a similar vein, we only analyze the simplest form of side-taking (i.e., a third-party takes sides in a conflict between two disputants). In fact, side-taking in real organizational life is more complicated than the form of triads. Empirical studies can adjust the ratio of third parties to disputants and add relative status into the ratio differences. For example, how would an employee take sides if three superiors are in a conflict? How would employees choose sides if a superior is in a conflict with a group of subordinates? These configurational characteristics may increase not only the accuracy of predicting side-taking reactions by third parties, but also the

organizational relevance and applicability. All in all, our theoretical framework on side-taking motives identifies an under-studied topic in conflict handling and calls for more empirical studies to further enrich and improve our understanding of how and why third parties take sides in a conflict.

Appendix.

Side-Taking Motives for 27 Configurations and 8 Cases of Status Differences between Third Party (C) and Two Disputants (A and B).

C' Status	A' Status	B' Status	Combinations	Configurations	Cases	C's Side-Taking Motives
		0	2-0-0	$C > (A = B)$	Case 1: Third party C has a <i>higher</i> status than both disputants A and B. Two disputants have an <i>equal</i> status.	moral motives
2	0	1	2-0-1	$C > B > A$	Case 2: Third party has a <i>higher</i> status than both disputants. One disputant has a higher status to the other.	moral motives
		2	2-0-2	$(C = B) > A$	Case 3: Third party has an equal status to one disputant and a higher status to the other.	moral and relationship motives

1	0	2-1-0	$C > A > B$	Case 2.	
	1	2-1-1	$C > (A = B)$	Case 1.	
	2	2-1-2	$(C = B) > A$	Case 3.	
2	0	2-2-0	$(C = A) > B$	Case 3	
	1	2-2-1	$(C = A) > B$	Case 3	
	2	2-2-2	$C = (A = B)$	Case 4. Third party has an equal status to both disputants.	Relationship motives for side-taking.
0	0	1-0-0	$C > (A = B)$	Case 1.	
	1	1-0-1	$(C = B) > A$	Case 3.	
	2	1-0-2	$B > C > A$	Case 5. Third party has a higher status to one disputant and a lower status to the other.	Self-interest and moral motives for side-taking.
1	0	1-1-0	$(C = A) > B$	Case 3.	
	1	1-1-1	$C = A = B$	Case 4.	

		2	1-1-2	$(C = A) < B$	Case 6. Third party has an equal status to one disputant and a lower status to the other.	Self-interest and relationship motives for side-taking.
		0	1-2-0	$B < C < A$	Case 5.	
	2	1	1-2-1	$(C = B) < A$	Case 6.	
		2	1-2-2	$C < (A = B)$	Case 7. Third party has a lower status than both disputants. Two disputants have an equal status.	Self-interest motives for side-taking.
		0	0-0-0	$C = A = B$	Case 4	
	0	1	0-0-1	$(C = A) < B$	Case 6.	
		2	0-0-2	$(C = A) < B$	Case 6	
		0	0-1-0	$(C = B) < A$	Case 6.	
0	1	1	0-1-1	$C < (A=B)$	Case 7.	

	2	0-1-2	$C < A < B$	Case 8. Third party has a lower status than both disputants. One disputant has a lower status to the other.	Self-interest motives for side-taking
	0	0-2-0	$(C = B) < A$	Case 6.	
2	1	0-2-1	$C < A < B$	Case 8.	
	2	0-2-2	$C < (A = B)$	Case 7.	

Note.

a. C represents a third-party. A and B represent two disputants.

b. 0 means a low rank; 1 means a medium rank; and 2 means a high rank in status.

c. The status of the two disputants A and B are interchangeable. That is, $A > B$ is the same as $B > A$.

d. Status differences make sense in term of the relative values but not the absolute values. For instance, the combination of 1-0-1 is the same as the combination of 2-1-2.

e. With the specifications c and d, the total 27 configurations are simplified into 8 cases to represent status differences between third party (C) and disputants (A and B).

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